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LEARNING STANDARD ENGLISH BY LINGUISTIC METHODS.

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THE AUTHOR, WHO SPENT A YEAR AS A FORD FELLOW STUDYING THE NON-STANDARD ENGLISH OF STUDENTS IN DETROIT, DESCRIBES BRIEFLY A SERIES OF TAPED LANGUAGE LESSONS FOR SECONDARY LEVEL WHICH WERE FOUND TO BE "EFFECTIVE TO A SIGNIFICANT DEGREE." (SEE RELATED DOCUMENT ED 003 588.) FURTHER EXPERIMENTATION WAS CARRIED OUT ON THE FIRST LEVEL OF PRIMARY SCHOOL, PREPARING AND TESTING A SERIES OF TAPES DESIGNED TO HELP CHILDREN FROM IMPOVERISHED BACKGROUNDS DEVELOP VERBAL FACILITY. IT WAS FELT THAT THE SOONER THE CHILD LEARNS TO DISTINGUISH THE SOUNDS OF THE HOME AND NEIGHBORHOOD FROM THOSE OF THE SCHOOL AND BUSINESS WORLD, AND HAS PRACTICE IN USING THE NEW SOUNDS THROUGH PARTICIPATION IN SONGS AND GAMES DESIGNED TO STRENGTHEN STANDARD USAGES, THE BETTER START HE WILL HAVE IN ALL COMMUNICATION SKILLS. THE TAPE SCRIPTS WERE DISCUSSED AND REVISED BY A MULTI-RACIAL TEAM OF TEACHERS AND SUPERVISORS AS WELL AS CONSULTING LINGUISTS AND EDUCATORS IN VARIOUS PARTS OF THE UNITED STATES. AFTER PRELIMINARY RECORDINGS WERE TESTED IN CLASSROOM SITUATIONS, THREE ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS IN DETROIT USED THE TAPES (THREE LESSONS A WEEK FOR 12 WEEKS). CONTROL GROUPS WERE TAUGHT "SPEECH IMPROVEMENT" ACCORDING TO THE USUAL METHODS. THE SPEECH SCORES BASED ON ORAL INTERVIEWS GIVEN BEFORE AND AFTER THE 12-WEEK INSTRUCTION PERIOD SHOWED A .05 LEVEL OF CONFIDENCE IN FAVOR OF THE EXPERIMENTAL GROUPS. NO OTHER FACTOR (SEX, EDUCATION OF PARENTS, SCHOOL BUILDING, OR MENTAL ABILITIES) SHOWED STATISTICAL SIGNIFICANCE. A PERSONALITY TEST ON "ANXIETY SCALE" WAS ADMINISTERED BOTH BEFORE AND AFTER THE TAPES WERE USED. NO EVIDENCE OF INCREASED ANXIETY DUE TO THE TAPE LESSONS WAS SHOWN. THESE TAPES, "GOLDEN SERIES OF AMERICAN ENGLISH LANGUAGE LESSONS AT HIGH SCHOOL LEVEL" (14 TAPES) AND "GOLDEN PRIMARY LANGUAGE LESSONS" (12 TAPES) ARE PRODUCED BY GOLDEN LANGUAGE TAPES, HIGHLAND PARK, MICHIGAN 48203. (AMM)

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LEARNING STANDARD ENGLISH BY LINGUISTIC METHODS

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The four major explosions that have occurred during our lifetime, the explosions in space, in population, in knowledge, and in freedom, have caused us to look critically at education. Language education, which is the basis for communicating all knowledge, has received its share of critical analysis.

The linguists have brought us en masse through a questioning period by rather abruptly discrediting the traditional methods of language teaching. Much of what English teachers had been teaching about language did not hold up as truth under careful examination.

Among the newer attitudes we have developed through their inquiries are these: The spoken language is primary, and the written derived from the spoken. Speech being an overlaid process, not biological, is a learned activity, and largely learned through imitation. The living, growing language no longer fits the grooves of Latin grammar. We use various levels of language depending upon the situation, but we keep the levels horizontal rather than vertical. We don't imply that some levels are higher or better than others.

We have learned all of this, and we know that we don't want to judge one's human worth by his language. However, the fact still remains that how one speaks is a strong indicator of social class origin.

This fact becomes readily apparent when one sees that so many

children from the inner-city encounter employment difficulties due to the lack of acceptance of their dialect by potential employers. It is further apparent in the large numbers of these youths who are placed in remedial language courses in colleges. Knowing this, the problem becomes one of finding a better way to teach inner-city children to become bi-dialectal; a better way to add standard dialect to the one they already have.

A year's study was spent as a Ford Fellow in 1955-56 comparing the language of students in six schools in Detroit to identify and determine the frequency of non-standard usages.[1]

In analyzing the elements of speech that produce negative reactions when heard by employers and others who make social class judgements, it was found that the speech of inner-city, mainly Negro students, contains differences in pitch, stress, and juncture as well as in structure, vocabulary, and pronunciation. New habits need to be formed which will bring about, among other language features: agreement in number between subject and verb; inclusion of the auxiliaries; use of the past tense signals of /d/ and /t/ as heard in verbs like played and stopped; use of other standard inflectional endings, particularly the /s/ and /z/ phonemes, and substitutes for the antiquated use of be. Altogether, a whole new sound system must emerge when the student switches to the dialect of standard English. He needs not just practice on words or segments, but the chance to practice the whole sound system of standard

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[1]Ruth I. Golden, Improving Patterns of Language Usage (Detroit, Michigan: Wayne State University Press, 1960.)

English. He needs to sharpen his auditory discrimination and to have the opportunity to imitate so that he can begin to feel comfortable in the second dialect.

Using this approach, a series of taped language lessons at secondary level, providing listening and repeating practice, was developed. The tapes were tested in a controlled experiment which was supported by a grant from the U.S. Office of Education through the Detroit Public Schools from 1960-62.[2]

The taped lessons were found to be effective to a significant degree in changing extempore and impromptu speech patterns. The experiment provided proof that tape-teaching is a sound technique and that this series of language lessons on tape comprises an effective method for helping students to gain facility in standard English speech.[3]

Since the method worked well with students who had already acquired their speech habits, it seemed wise to start at the time when the child first came to school to give him practice in standard patterns before his speech habits were firmly entrenched.

The first level of primary school was selected for further experimentation. Again a two-year federal grant under NDEA Title VII-A

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[2]Ruth Golden, Effectiveness of Instructional Tapes for Changing Regional Speech Patterns, Final Report, OE Title VII, Project No. 559, (Ann Arbor, Michigan: University Microfilms, Inc., 1963.)

[3]_____, Golden Series of American English Language Lessons at High School Level, 14 Magnetic Tapes, (Highland Park, Michigan: Golden Language Tapes, 1963.)

_____, Changing Dialects Record, (Englewood, New Jersey: Scholastic Magazines - Folkways Records, 1964.)

made possible the development and testing of a series of twelve tapes each containing three short lessons at the primary level. These have been tested in three schools in Detroit.[4] They are now being tried in ten states.

In establishing the rationale for this program, there seemed to be plenty of evidence that it would be successful. Nelson Francis has stated, ". . . The best help that can be afforded the child is to supply him with a milieu of clear and intelligent talk to imitate. He will do the rest."[5] For children who are talked to very little at home other than to be given commands, talking with Mr. and Mrs. Mike, the friendly personalities they meet by voice, seems to have quite an impact, and it is expected that the sentences and phrases they imitate at a time when they are searching for a means of expression may be retained.

Martin Deutsch, Charles Silberman, and others have pointed up the need to help children from impoverished backgrounds catch up on the many skills they are lacking which teachers and the curriculum take for granted, and which most middle-class children have acquired as a matter of course.[6]

A study of slum families in New York revealed that in one-half of the families contacted, the children do not eat with their

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[4]Ruth I. Golden, Teaching Standard English to Urban Primary Children, Final Report, OE Title VII-A, (ERIC Document Reproduction Services, Grant No. OEG-7-32-10168-278, Project No. 5-0368.)

[5]W. Nelson Francis, The Structure of American English, (New York: The Ronald Press Company, 1958), p. 554.

[6]Martin Deutsch, "Facilitating Development in the Pre-School Child: Social and Psychological Perspectives." Merrill-Palmer Quarterly 10: 249-63; July 1964.

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parents or have opportunities to talk to them except about elementary matters of physical necessities.[7] As Silberman says, "These children do not conceive of an adult as a person of whom you ask questions and from whom you get answers.[8] They are poorly motivated because they have had little experience in receiving approval for success in a task or disapproval for failure.

Walter Loban's study in California has shown that the children with the greatest verbal facility in kindergarten continue to excell in all other aspects all the way up to the ninth grade.[9]

It would seem, then, that anything we could do to give the child verbal facility as early as possible would pay dividends. Taped lessons with models to imitate should at least improve listening skills and provide auditory discrimination. The sooner the child learns to distinguish the sounds of the home and neighborhood from those of the school and business world, and has practice in using the new sounds through participation in songs and games designed to strengthen standard usages, the better start he will have in all communication skills.

Informal standard English is presented as an alternative way of speaking to achieve clarity and general understanding. The taped medium permits emphasizing the whole speech pattern and associating language learning with friendliness and happiness. The factor of

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[7]Joseph D. Lohman, "Expose - Don't Impose." NEA Journal, LV (January, 1966), 24.

[8]Charles E. Silberman, "Give Slum Children a Chance." Harper's CCXXVII (May, 1964), 37-42.

[9]Walter Loban, The Language of Elementary School Children, (Champaign, Illinois: National Council of Teachers of English, 1963.)

the teacher's personal disapproval of the child's language is also eliminated.

On the tapes, the two voices representing Mr. and Mrs. Mike involve the children in repeating songs, poems, and speaking games. Occasionally they greet the children in foreign languages and teach them the foreign words of greeting to illustrate the point that while there are many ways to speak, we speak just the way Mr. Mike speaks to be understood in school.[10]

Thought and care went into the writing of the scripts to insure that they would have appeal, that they would provide sufficient practice in the specific usages that would offset the deviations and produce a measurable effect, and that they would do all of this without offending the child or affecting his personality in a negative way.

After the scripts had been written, a team consisting of teachers and supervisors of multi-racial representation read the scripts aloud and discussed them thoroughly. When this group was satisfied with revisions, the scripts were sent to consultants who were linguists and educators in various parts of the country. After the suggestions of all the consultants were incorporated, the material was recorded. The preliminary recordings were tested in classroom situations and further revisions were made.

The challenge in writing the scripts was to have something appropriate to talk about for continuity in dialogue that would

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[10]Ruth I. Golden, Golden Primary Language Lessons, 12 Tapes Containing 36 Lessons, (Highland Park, Michigan: Golden Language Tapes, 1967.)

contribute to concept building, besides lending itself to practice on specific elements of speech, and yet be sufficiently appealing to maintain pupil interest. Among the concepts which are built into the series are: joy in work, pride in country, and pride in self.

The warm personalities of Mr. and Mrs. Mike encourage trust because they are honest in making clear what they are trying to do without preaching. The children sing, "This is the way we play the game: we talk like Mike in school." Other verses to the same song include, "We listen to Mike," and "We say what he says."

The lessons focus some attention on the formation of sounds because it was thought that a language shift would be facilitated by a conscious effort. An objective was to help children form the sounds, and to help those who do form them correctly, to develop more flexibility of their lips, tongue, and other parts of the speech mechanism.[11]

To test the effectiveness of this package of taped lessons in changing the dialect patterns, experimental and control classes were set up in three Detroit elementary schools. Teachers in the experimental sections presented the taped lessons at the rate of one tape a week. Each tape contains three lessons, and they were used for twelve weeks. Teachers in the control classes continued their usual method of teaching speech improvement without knowledge of what the tapes specifically contained.

Because of concern that the tapes might have some psychological effect on the personalities of the children, a personality test, or anxiety scale, was administered by the teachers of all classes before

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[11]Ruth I. Golden, Teacher's Guide to the Golden Primary Language Lessons, (Highland Park, Michigan: Golden Language Tapes, 1967.)

and after the tapes were heard, and all teachers prepared information sheets concerning pupil data.

The speech scores were based on taped oral interviews given before and after. Interviews were conducted using two pictures, and questions designed to bring out non-standard usages if they were a part of the child's repertoire. All children came willingly and all participated in the interviews. A shiny penny given to each child served several purposes as an inducement to speech.

The tape-recorded interviews were then sent to trained speech specialists who, using a check-off sheet with room to write additions, counted the number of deviations from standard speech. They did not know which tapes represented the experimental sections and which were from the control sections.

The data were again submitted to the analysis of variance-covariance technique. The data, made to fit a seventy-two cell grid, limited by five factors, were machine computed. The fave factors, as in the high school experiment, were (1) Group, (2) Sex, (3) Education of Parents, (4) School Building, and (5) Mental Abilities. Of these factors, Group, which meant the difference between using the tapes or not, was statistically significant in favor of the Experimental Group at the .05 level of confidence. No other factor showed statistical significance. In other words, the change was not due to Sex, Education of Parents, School Building, or Mental Abilities, but to the tapes. The tapes can be used to advantage regardless of any of these factors.

The results of the personality testing based on the Sarason Scale which the teachers in both types of sections checked, showed no evidence of increased anxiety because of the taped lessons. Approx-

imately two-thirds of both groups showed more evidence of relative freedom from anxiety at the end than at the beginning of the experiment.

It was the researcher's contention that to shift from one dialect to another a certain word, or sound, may be the transition, the key, or the wedge. For this particular shift, the sound of the diphthong /aI/ as in the words, high, and buy, was used with success. Anticipating the substitution of the sound of the low front vowel /æ/ for /aI/, the interviewers' questions were designed to bring out the words fine, five, mine, die, and sometimes, and their divergent pronunciations. Drill on the standard enunciation of this diphthong was also purposely included in the lessons as in the use of the name Mike and such words as hi, my, I, guy, pie, ride, etc. That the lessons did prove effective in teaching the standard form of this key sound is shown by a 66% decrease in the use of the divergent pronunciation. There was a 30% decrease in the substitution of the sound /In/ for /Iŋ/ on word endings.

From the linguistic standpoint there is no reason why we should want to change /In/ for /Iŋ/, but the fact that the students did change this measurable item is indicative of other speech changes that took place in the direction of clarity.

A 20% decrease in the omission of the /l/ sound as in help, as well as a 28% decrease in the addition of the /s/ and /z/ sounds to words like mine, man, and men also took place. There was little change, however, in the words people with the plural inflection added and cents with the plural inflection omitted. The children still said peoples and ten cent, which means that more intensive

practice on these two features is needed since the divergent forms seem firmly entrenched in the speech of six year olds. The substitution of /i/ for /e/ in penny, ten, and cent dropped 27%. The omission of is and are as the main verb or the auxiliary dropped 31%.

The experiment points the way to greater use of this technique. The children who conversed with Mr. and Mrs. Mike and learned to imitate their way of speaking improved in standard American English to a far greater extent than the comparable group in which traditional methods of language development were used.

Of the four major explosions of our lifetime mentioned in the opening paragraph, the explosion in space has caused us to apply scientific reasoning to language education as well as to all other phases of education. The explosion in knowledge has made it possible for us to conduct research and to compute results in minutes which formerly sometimes took years to decipher mathematically, and our rapid reproduction methods now hasten the application of the results of research to improving education. The explosion in population has caused vast migrations of people all over the world and particularly in this country from rural pockets in the South to our Northern and Western urban centers. These migrants bring with them language differences which put them at a disadvantage socially and vocationally. Finally, the explosion in freedom has made us even more aware of the fact that each individual is important. Each deserves his full share of education that he may participate to his fullest extent in our society and reap its rewards.